

New Horizons

Housing That Supports Independence



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Program That Is Model For Others

by Teresa Dixon Murray, Reprinted from The Plain Dealer/TNS | February 4, 2020



Photo courtesy Lisa DeJong/The Plain Dealer/TNS)

CLEVELAND — Bob Darrow started as a data analyst at KeyBank in Brooklyn last summer. A numbers guru, he sifts through data for KeyBank's loan services operations and creates spreadsheets for others on his team.

At 47, he hadn't held a full-time job in more than 20 years. Darrow has autism. And he is an absolute rock star at KeyBank, his bosses say. He's better at some parts of his job than a computer would be. A graduate of Cleveland State University, Darrow for years has drifted in and out of jobs, many of them below his skill level. His previous job was stocking shelves. Before

that, he did document imaging. He loves his position at KeyBank. "It's really cool," he said. "I'm in the game. This was such a godsend."

Darrow was hired through a new partnership between KeyBank and The Precisionists, a 3 1/2-year-old venture aimed at recruiting people who have various disabilities and matching them with jobs at companies nationwide such as Pfizer, UBS, Exelon Energy and Vanderbilt University.

The Precisionists, based in Delaware, assesses prospective employees and trains them for jobs that match their skills. Roughly two-thirds are hired and placed on a contract basis with companies; the rest aren't ready for employment just yet. So far, eight people have worked at KeyBank through the partnership, in positions such as anti-money-laundering, fraud detection, data entry, analysis and the mailroom. All have autism. Three more are coming on board in the next couple of weeks.

Michael O'Boyle, a senior vice president at KeyBank, noted studies show **the brain of a person with autism processes 42 percent more information than a neuro-typical one.** And frankly, people with autism tend to be better at many tasks than traditional employees.

"This isn't just a feel-good story. It's delivering results," O'Boyle said. "It's mission and margin." Many people with autism offer skills that are highly desired, such as the ability to focus and not get distracted, said Evan Taylor, a project manager for The Precisionists who works on-site at KeyBank.

Indeed, for some people with autism, the issues that often represent challenges for them are actually assets to employers. At KeyBank, workers with autism tend to excel at repetitive tasks and they're detail-oriented, O'Boyle said. They're fantastic at detecting money-laundering patterns, for example. They also demonstrate accuracy, honesty, reliability and

Continued on page 5

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“My Two Cents”

By *Tim Doherty, Executive Director*



Well when I first heard this news, I smiled and said, “of course, we are the perfect venue for this kind of news.” And the news was that NJ HMFA wants to announce a new program of financing that will help to fund Special Needs Housing and wanted to do it at our new West Windsor housing community. So, we were honored to have Lt. Governor Sheila Y. Oliver and HMFA Executive

Director Charles A. Richman combine their announcement with our ribbon cutting for our new housing community in West Windsor. Unfortunately, Lt. Governor Oliver eventually could not attend.

This Freedom Village site is located off of Old Bear Brook Rd in West Windsor. This project has been one that has been in the making for over ten years. I started talks with the owner in the 1990’s and kept in touch with him each year, to see what his timeline was for when this community could begin. The tricky issue was to get this to conform with the available funding mechanisms, as well as work within the Low Income Tax Credit program, which we did.

Also, the time had to be right for the town politically. Like what usually happens with our housing, we had an advocate-- someone who was a West Windsor resident, and who was also a member of the Project Freedom family. Her name is Florence Cohen. Florence was a Board member for Project Freedom for many years, and an advocate for our housing in West Windsor. She served on the Affordable Housing Committee within the town, and would keep the name of Project Freedom in the forefront of any discussion regarding affordable housing. Having a family member with a disability only made it more personal for Florence when she talked about Project Freedom housing.

This is not unusual for Project Freedom to have advocates in the towns that we build. Usually we are contacted initially by parents groups who realize that when their kids get to be adults, there really isn’t any appropriate housing that will meet their needs. They want to stay in the town and want their now adult children also to live in proximity of where they grew up. This makes a lot of sense, especially for those with a disability. So, these people contact Project Freedom to see what we can do to help. And of course, if we can, we try.

So, having the Lt. Governor asking to come to announce a new housing program was really a feather in the Project Freedom hat. We have worked hard to build a housing product that fits the need, is sustainable, and is located in locations that are convenient to shops and transportation. Our West Windsor site is one that fits that bill, with the West Windsor Train station located just a couple of blocks away, and shopping found on the Princeton-Hightstown Road.

So, once again, we have created another housing community that will be open to all---especially those who use a wheelchair or who have mobility issues. The mission continues.

From Norman's Desk



This month you will be reading and hearing more about the emerging outbreak of Coronavirus-2019 (officially named CONVID-19). The situation is very worrisome—especially if you have a disability.

Nevertheless, one of the key responses to this type of situation is accurate information and recognizing the source of it.

I'm going to be blunt about this: The "tin foil hat wearing nuts" are out there already with disinformation to fit their own agendas or mania. These theories are fabricated using facts, half-truths, and outright lies woven together to fit any point of view.

They can be laughable except these flights of fantasies will obscure the correct information and messaging needed to keep us safe and well. Misinformation is disruptive and will lead to people dying.

I saw one tweet that contained a claim that was not true, and the link for more information redirected me to an online store to buy masks, but then I saw another tweet dismissing the use of masks. People are trying to make a quick buck from the outbreak, and people are trying to scare us for their own pleasure.

My message is this: Do not rely on Facebook or other social media to for information to make urgent health decisions!

Your Facebook friends may be good sources for gossip, recipes, sports trivia, or where to go fishing, but accurate information in these situations may not be a Facebook post shared a zillion times. The quantity of shares or views does not indicate the quality or accuracy of the information.

Sadly, even our elected officials can pass on erroneous information that they may have heard or read from an unreliable source. It is easy to pass on tainted information as you try to appear to be on top of everything, and it is hard on the ego to appear not to know authoritative information.

By the time you read this, any accurate information that I can pass along will be outdated and may be inaccurate. Personally, I rely on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for information, I check CDC.gov daily for updates.

Norman A. Smith, Associate Executive Director -
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An infographic titled "NOVEL CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK (2019-nCoV)" with the CDC logo. It features a large illustration of hands being washed with soap and water. To the right of the illustration, a yellow box contains the text "You can help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses with these actions:". Below this, a dark blue box lists three bullet points: "• Avoid close contact with people who are sick.", "• Avoid touching your eyes, nose & mouth.", and "• Wash hands often with soap & water for at least 20 seconds." The bottom right corner of the infographic displays the website "www.cdc.gov/nCoV" and a timestamp "314705-A February 10, 2020 6:32 PM".

2019 nCoV CORONAVIRUS

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK (2019-nCoV)

You can help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses with these actions:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose & mouth.
- Wash hands often with soap & water for at least 20 seconds.

CDC

www.cdc.gov/nCoV

314705-A February 10, 2020 6:32 PM

Continued from page 1

perseverance, he said. Most employers don't realize what they're missing by not reaching out to people with disabilities, said Patricia Otter, president of the nonprofit UCP of Greater Cleveland, which works with people who receive disability benefits. "It's the disability that is their strength," Otter said.

Ernie Dianastasis, CEO of The Precisionists, founded the company in mid-2016 after his IT services company hired a handful of people with autism to do software development and testing. The results were amazing, he said. The newly hired workers had a great work ethic, they were loyal and they were precise. Thus the precisionists. "It was off the charts. That's when the light bulb went off," he said. Dianastasis said many people with autism have plenty of ability, but may not do well in a job interview. "This is not a group that is going to make small talk. Or they may sit there and fidget or may not look you in the eye."

Taylor Trovato, 27, feels like her job in data entry at KeyBank is perfect for her. In addition to data entry, she sorts and scans mail. When an item gets returned to KeyBank because of an incorrect address or error, it's her responsibility to solve the issue and update the data. Like Darrow, she's worked in other jobs before. But they either were only part-time or weren't challenging enough. "I've always wanted to do office work," said Trovato, of Seven Hills. "I love it here." Workers earn market-competitive wages. The workers at KeyBank are technically employed by The Precisionists and are contracted out to KeyBank.

The Precisionists now has hubs in Philadelphia, Nashville and Phoenix and is considering opening one in Cleveland if it believes there's enough demand now that KeyBank is on board. At a hub office, people could apply to be assessed, evaluated and trained for jobs at various companies, perhaps large employers such as Sherwin-Williams, Progressive and Eaton, Dianastasis said. O'Boyle said many employers like KeyBank today find there's a shortage of good workers with the skills they need. Dianastasis cites studies that 75 percent of people with autism are unemployed or underemployed, which is such a waste, he said. "You just need to understand where people's strengths are," he said. For example, workers with autism tend to thrive at software coding, pattern recognition and repetitive tasks. "There is not a shred of charity in this model," Dianastasis said, adding that his employees are "as good as or better than other employees ... The program would never be sustainable if the performance wasn't there."

At UCP of Greater Cleveland, which helps place people with disabilities at local employers, Otter said she believes The Precisionists is the first private company operating locally with this business model. And she hopes The Precisionists can find more opportunities locally. Each year, her agency places about 125 people with various developmental, physical, behavioral and intellectual challenges. UCP clients get referred because they receive disability benefits. UCP assesses them, trains them and helps them apply for jobs and prepare for interviews. But there are probably several thousand local residents with disabilities who could work and need jobs, said Paul Soprano, director of adult services at UCP. "There's a huge untapped labor pool out there," he said.

Otter said employers may not turn to UCP or other agencies because they don't realize its services are a free way to find good employees. So far, most of The Precisionists' employees have autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or obsessive-compulsive disorder. The company also is starting to recruit veterans with disabilities and people with hearing or vision issues. Its goal is to create 10,000 jobs for people with disabilities by 2025. Currently, it employs about 110 people with disabilities, plus about 25 in leadership.

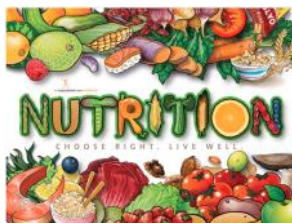
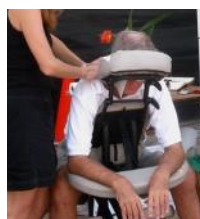
Soprano at UCP said everyone wins when companies hire people with disabilities. Companies get productive employees, workers feel fulfilled and society benefits too. He said people placed by UCP contributed \$1.5 million in wages in the community.

O'Boyle said KeyBank may offer some permanent positions with benefits to some of the current Precisionists contractors. And the company will look to place Precisionists workers in other departments, such as technology and operations, risk and consumer banking. "Essentially we are looking for areas that require laser focus and repeatable tasks," he said. There are plenty of people around Cleveland who could fill those positions, said Sally Farwell, president and CEO of Achievement Centers for Children in Highland Hills, which works with children and adults with various physical and developmental disabilities. "There are a whole lot of individuals sitting at home who want to do meaningful work," Farwell said. She added that partnerships like the one between KeyBank and The Precisionists are preparing the workplace for disability diversity. Employers could discover a whole new labor pool out there, she said. For its part, KeyBank is thankful for the partnership and hopes to be a model other Cleveland-area companies could follow, O'Boyle said. "Key is changing lives with this program."



Hamilton Happenings

DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
3/9	Mon	Hamilton Chair Yoga Exercise	6:00 - 7:00 pm
3/21	Sat	Friends Connection Irish Celebration at Hamilton	6:00 - 9:00 pm
3/23	Mon	Hamilton Easter Crafting	5:00 - 7:00 pm



Lawrence Events

DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
3/10	Tues	Heart to Heart Massages	Sign up
3/10	Tues	Lawrence Chair Yoga Exercise	4:30 - 6:30 pm
3/12	Thurs	Yoga	4:00 pm
3/18	Wed	Nutrition	7:00 pm
3/19	Thurs	Tai Chi	4:00 pm
3/24	Tues	Lawrence Easter Crafting	4:30 - 6:30 pm
3/30	Mon	People & Stories	2:30 pm

Lawrence PF tenant, Becky Scheick won 3 GOLD medals won at the Special Olympics Winter Games. Becky brought home the gold in the 100 meter dash, 200 meter dash and the 4x100 relay!

We are so proud of Becky and everyone who participated in the Special Olympics!





Robbinsville Events

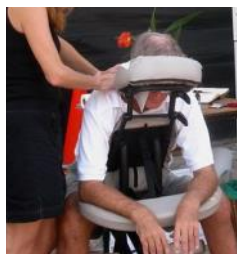


DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
2/3	Mon	Robbinsville Games & Tacos	6:00 - 8:00 pm
3/9	Mon	"Day Rec" - Robbinsville	2:00 - 4:00 pm
3/16	Mon	"Day Rec" - Robbinsville	2:00 - 4:00 pm
3/16	Mon	Robbinsville Easter Crafting	6:00 - 8:00 pm
3/23	Mon	"Day Rec" - Robbinsville	2:00 - 4:00 pm
3/30	Mon	"Day Rec" - Robbinsville	2:00 - 4:00 pm



Hopewell Events

DAT	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
3/5	Thur	Friends Connection Exercise Program	5:00 - 7:00 pm
3/6	Fri	Mercer Home Health Pokeno	3:00 - 4:00 pm
3/10	Tues	Angelic Touch Chair Massages	1:15 - 3:15 pm
3/12	Thur	Tenant Meeting/Home Healthy Guide	4:00 - 6:00 pm
3/12	Thur	Hopewell Chair Yoga Exercise	5:00 - 7:00 pm
3/18	Wed	Angelic Touch Chair Massages	9:30 - 11:15 am
3/26	Thur	Friends Connection Easter Crafting	5:00 - 7:00 pm



How Interior Design Can Be A Tool In Managing Life With Autism

by Diane Cowen, Houston / reprinted from The Chronicle/TNS | February 18, 2020

HOUSTON — Justin Moehn's vast amiibo collection, comfortable gaming chairs and a large screen set up in a very specific way in his Richmond bedroom are evidence of his highly focused affection for video games. Jess Faerman's small apartment in Houston has a single chair she's willing to sit on and a circular path for her compulsive need for pacing.

For Hannah Warren, who lives in Southeast Houston, a velvety soft covering on an air mattress and drops of lavender oil are her keys to a good night's sleep, for now, anyway.

All three have autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, a developmental disability whose cause is still a mystery to researchers. As they, educators and parents all look for ways to cope in the classroom and at home, one thing they know for certain is that the right interior design can help children and adults manage the anxiety and behaviors that typically accompany autism, improving life for them and other members of their families.

Important elements include color, texture, lighting and the durability of furnishings, say parents and experts. Don Lawrence, who works in health care facility planning at CannonDesign, comes to the topic with two points of view: one as a trained design planner and the other as a father of a 29-year-old son who has autism. "Research has taken off in the last five years," Lawrence said of both searching for information about cause, treatment and daily coping skills.

Lawrence, who lives in Sugar Land, had a background in health care when he returned to the University of Texas to study architecture years ago. Now he works exclusively in health care design planning, and recently finished work on an autism clinic at Children's Hospital of Orange County in California. "We did research on current thinking about interventions, primarily looking for ways to create a calming and relaxing environment. There's a lot of research on color and sound and transitions from space to space," Lawrence said, noting that design elements that work in a clinical setting work in homes and schools, too.

Color and light — both natural and artificial — are two important elements of home design, and they're big factors in homes that have a child or adult with autism. Lawrence explained that the slight flicker of a fluorescent light bulb, which are still used extensively in offices, stores and schools, can seem to a person with autism as the rest of us might see a strobe light. Imagine all of the homes built in the 1980s and 1990s with light boxes for fluorescent tubes over their kitchen islands — every one of them is a problem if someone in the household has autism. Lawrence and special education consultant Robin Rettie of Lighthouse Learning & Resource both said that soothing colors are essential. In a bedroom, pale greens and blues with gray undertones are often talked about as calming colors — the same holds true for people with autism. Muted shades of lavender or purple also help calm people with ASD. Bright colors such as red, orange or yellow — colors you see often see in classrooms and toys for young children — appear so harsh that they can cause outbursts.

Nearly everyone with autism avoids bright lights. In Moehn's bedroom — where he spends a good deal of his time — he has just a single bulb in the three-light ceiling-mounted light fixture and usually keeps the plantation shutters on his only window closed. Rettie and Lawrence both said dimmable lights and bulbs with a warmer glow are best, so they can be adjusted.

Texture is a huge factor — people with autism generally prefer soft, silky fabrics over anything rough or scratchy — so bedding and upholstery have to be chosen carefully. You don't have to use them everywhere in your home, just in the bedroom of the person with autism — it's advisable they have their own room — and in a place they like to sit when they're with others.

Moehn, 37, who lives with his parents, treats his room as his own retreat, with satin sheets on his bed to help him sleep. Faerman, 33, who has her own apartment, puts a soft blanket on the only chair she will sit on in her apartment. The softness of the plush toys on her bed helps soothe her.

Janice Warren has struggled to help her daughter, 12-year-old Hannah, whose challenges change as she ages. She slept on a twin bed but wore it out — jumping on furniture can be an issue, so it needs to be more durable. While she looked for a new bed, she let Hannah sleep on an air mattress that had a soft, velvety cover. Her daughter was getting the best sleep she'd ever had, so she halted the new-bed search. Warren has also incorporated aromatherapy, using plant-based lavender oil that helps calm her daughter, who is mainstreamed in school but not highly functional and has poor verbal skills. She adds the oil to shampoo and lotion and occasionally puts a couple of drops on her pillow and in dresser drawers, which, by the way, have labels for individual items that go in them.

Structure is vital for people with autism, so organizing systems help them cope. Knowing which shelf in a pantry, drawer in a refrigerator or container in a closet has their things fosters independence via daily living skills and is comforting. When things are out of place, though, it can be overwhelming, and the person may shut down or act out. That's one reason why clutter can send people with autism into a tailspin. For some, simply having art on a wall is a bother. A kitchen counter full of gadgets or toys scattered on a floor are problems.

Affirmations and reminders are important, so having bulletin boards or chalkboards for messages is a big need. Faerman keeps a whiteboard with reminders above her computer and an index card with a list of things she needs (phone, keys, wallet, inhaler and self-care stuff) on the inside of her apartment door. Moehn's room features things that reinforce his accomplishments: a certificate for perfect attendance his senior year in high school, a certificate in PC technical support he earned at Wharton County Junior College and artwork he's proud of from elementary school. They're part of why he loves his room, and remind him of what he can do. Not long ago he started a part-time job at a mental health provider that treats children with autism. "It shows employers that people like me can do a job," Moehn said. "And I think it gives hope to parents who come in with their kids. Something is possible."

Nationally, Waiting Lists For Waiver Services Growing

By Michelle Diamant | reprinted from DisAbility Scoop February 7, 2020

The number of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the country who are on waiting lists to receive Medicaid-funded home- and community-based services is on the rise. There were 473,000 people on waiting lists in 2017, some 49,000 more than the year before, according to an analysis released Thursday by the ANCOR Foundation and United Cerebral Palsy. Known as the "Case for Inclusion," the annual report examines 58 measures to assess how well states are serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Nationally, waiting list enrollment jumped nearly 12 percent, the report found. In looking at states individually, though, the picture varied. Nine states and Washington, D.C. had no wait at all while another 10 saw their lists shrink between 2016 and 2017. In 23 states, the waiting list grew, with the most extreme example in Texas where nearly 218,000 people were seeking services.

One issue that may help explain the lack of community-based offerings for people with disabilities is the shortage of direct support workers to assist them, the report notes. Across the country, the analysis found that the turnover rate for these workers is 43.8 percent, leaving 8.1 percent of full-time and 17.3 percent of part-time positions vacant.

States are also struggling to help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities find jobs. Since the last Case for Inclusion report a year ago, the analysis found that just 3,000 more individuals attained integrated employment, an increase of 1 percentage point, bringing the total number of people in this population who are working to 127,000 nationwide.

Those behind the report said the findings highlight the significant needs that people with disabilities have. "Especially as we head into 2020 and one of the most pivotal election years our nation has seen, it is absolutely critical that lawmakers at all levels of government understand how decades of underinvestment in long-term supports and services for people with I/DD has been one of our generation's most significant public policy failures," said Barbara Merrill, chief executive officer for the ANCOR Foundation. Previous incarnations of the Case for Inclusion have ranked states on their disability services. That overall comparison was left out of the current report due to methodology that was "becoming needlessly complex," the authors said.

Children's Books Win Awards For Disability Storylines

by Shaun Heasley / Reprinted from DisAbility Scoop February 5, 2020

As the Newbery and Caldecott Medals call out the best new children's titles, several books are being honored for telling stories of those with autism and other disabilities.

The American Library Association named three winners and three honorees of its Schneider Family Book Awards late last month.

The awards, which recognize authors and illustrators for the portrayal of the disability experience, are given annually in three categories.

The winner in the young children's group is U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor's book "Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You," which shows kids that differences make us stronger.

"A Friend for Henry" by Jenn Bailey — a story about friendship told from the perspective of a boy with autism — received the young children's honor title.

Meanwhile, Lynne Kelly's "A Song for a Whale" won in the middle grade category, which targets kids ages 9 to 13. The book tells of a 12-year-old who is deaf who goes on a quest to help a whale who can't communicate with other whales.

"Each Tiny Spark" by Pablo Cartaya, which follows a daughter's experience as her father returns from a deployment, received the honor title in that category.

In the teen category, Karol Ruth Silverstein's "Cursed" won for telling the story of a girl with juvenile arthritis.

And Alison Gervais' "The Silence Between Us" about a deaf teen who is adjusting to a high school where everyone else can hear received the honor title.

Winners of the Schneider Family Book Awards will each receive \$5,000 and a framed plaque during the library association's annual conference in June in Chicago.



"A Friend for Henry" and "Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You" are among the books being recognized by this year's Schneider Family Book Awards. (Handout)



Disney on Ice
March 28, 2020
Cure Arena, Trenton, N.J.

Show time 3 pm
Bus leaves Robbinsville at 1pm.

\$15 per person— pay when you sign up
and no returns

We are NOT stopping for lunch-eat beforehand

Contact Mary or Esther 609-448-2998

hello March!

MARCH

General Recreation

Club Freedom Events Highlighted

3/2	Mon	"Day Rec" - Robbinsville	2:00—4:00 pm
3/4	Wed	Hamilton/Lawrence Shopping	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 am
3/9	Mon	"Day Rec" - Robbinsville	2:00—4:00 pm
3/11	Wed	Grocery Shopping - Shop Rite	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 am
3/11	Wed	Westampton Chair Yoga Exercise	4:30-6:30 pm
3/12	Thu	Mall Trip Moorestown Mall 5 Needed	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 am
3/19	Thu	Columbus Farmers & Flea Market	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 am
3/25	Wed	Grocery Shopping - Shop Rite	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 am
3/25	Wed	Westampton Easter Crafting	Prog. Time 4:30-6:30 am
3/28	Sat	Disney On Ice - Cure Arena	Bus Leaves PFI 1:00 pm
3/30	Mon	"Day Rec" - Robbinsville	2:00—4:00 pm



Would You Like to Sign Up for Horseback Riding?

We currently have a spot available to attend horseback riding therapy (hippo-therapy) in Hopewell.

- Classes are on Wednesdays from 11:30—11:45.
- Riders must have a disability and weigh under 200lbs.
- Transportation is available

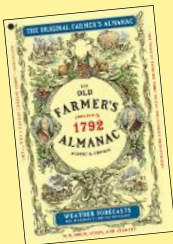
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March 2020 Long Range Weather Forecast for Atlantic Corridor from The Old Farmers Almanac



Dates

Mar 1-8

Mar 9-11

Mar 12-18

Mar 19-21

Mar 22-27

Mar 28-31

March

Weather Conditions

Periods of rain and snow, chilly

Sunny north, rain south

Rainy periods, mild

Sunny, cold

Rainy periods, chilly

Rain and snow north, sunny south; cool

temperature 42° (2° below avg.)
precipitation 5.5" (1.5" above avg.)

